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ABSTRACT

This document describes a program that will give Polish students the opportunity to learn about the political institutions of their country and the linkages among these institutions. Because knowledge of the structure and operating principles of central governing institutions is relatively poor among Polish youth, the Civis Polonus program was developed to enable students to observe the operations of the Polish political system directly and indirectly through simulations and educational games. In the course of five days spent in Warsaw, 50 students and 10 teachers from across Poland had the opportunity to observe the methods involved in decision making by the major branches of the national government. Long term program goals include: (1) closing the gap between young citizens and their elected representatives; (2) learning about the operations of major governmental institutions; (3) stimulating young citizens' interest in the activities of these institutions; (4) stimulating the institutions' interest in the problems associated with disseminating the information concerning the functioning of the Polish political system to Polish youth; (5) increasing the levels of activity among young people in their educational and local environments; and (6) initiating local programs that would be modeled on this program. The booklet lists the materials that will be prepared for the program. Requirements for participants are listed. A time line and outline of activities are included. (DK)

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ED 404 197

Civis Polonus

A Draft Proposal
for
The Development of Active Citizenship Among Poland's Youth

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I. Introduction

Knowledge of the structure and operating principles of central governing institutions is relatively poor among Polish youth. Naturally, each citizen of the Polish Republic is aware of the existence of the institution of the President, Sejm, Senate, the Executive Branch, the Supreme Court, or the Constitutional Tribunal, but the level of their authority and the linkages among them are not as well known. The best way to learn about these institutions and the linkages among them is to observe their operations directly or to experience them indirectly through simulations, educational games, and so on. Civis Polonus would create such an opportunity. In the course of five days spent in Warsaw, 50 students and 10 teachers from across Poland will have an opportunity to observe closely the methods involved in decision making by the major branches of the national government. Plans are now being undertaken to secure participation of The President of The Polish Republic and The Prime Minister. It is likely that these officials will participate.

II. Need for the Program

In the course of their education, students should have a chance to undertake experiences that will be more memorable and motivational than teachers' lectures. If democratic institutions are to thrive, citizens must understand them, how they work, and how they can participate in them. Polish schools are revitalizing their curriculum to teach students these things, but that education is enhanced when they participate in experiential learning outside the school. Programs like those conducted by The Presidential Classroom, The Close Up Foundation, The Washington Workshops, Boys State, and Junior Statesmen have been highly successful in doing this in the United States.

No program of this nature exists in Poland. What students learn about the democratic system of government in Poland comes from formal, didactic lessons in their schools and the particularly sensational news broadcasts concerning the Polish national government. The need for a program of this kind is evident in its absence and potential contribution to the continuing development of democracy in Poland.

The experiences of other countries where programs such as this have succeeded suggest that Civis Polonus presents an ideal opportunity to expand students' knowledge of the Polish political system and to make its operations "closer to home" and less abstract. By engaging young minds in the experiences, problems, and decision making processes that highlight government in a democracy, the future of Poland will rest more securely in the hands of the first generation of Polish citizens to reach adulthood in a free, democratic society.

III. Long-Term Program Goals

In addition to having an intellectual value, a primary goal of Civis Polonus is to provide students with an opportunity for more affective experiences and, thus, to stimulate their interest in politics and participatory citizenship. As a result, the long-term goals of the program include:

- closing the gap between young citizens and their elected representatives;

- learning about the operations of major governmental institutions;

- stimulating young citizens' interest in the activities of these institutions;

- stimulating the institutions' interest in the problems associated with disseminating the information concerning the functioning of the Polish political system to the Polish youth;

- increasing the levels of activity among young people in their educational and local environments; and

- initiating local programs which would be modelled on this program.

IV. Program Objectives

In order to achieve these goals, the program will:

- facilitate student learning and understanding of the principles underlying democratic institutions;

- enable students to meet with leaders in Polish government and other sectors;

- provide an opportunity for students to share their concerns with the leaders;

- integrate the circles of active youth to create an influential, active network that will constitute a potential future source for programs conducted by the Center for Civic and Economic Education and the Association of Civic Education Teachers; and

- promote educationally valuable youth activities that also contribute to building democratic institutions in Poland.

IV. Program Implementation

A. Preparation of materials

During the initial phase of the program, the focus will be on preparing materials for the participants. These will include:

- a brochure describing the rationale for Civis Polonus;
- information about the program for politicians, representatives of governing institutions, and other national leaders;
- brochures about the history, structure, and powers of the major branches of government;
- the rules and materials for the simulation game called "Parliamentary Debate";
- the rules and materials for the social networking game;
- the materials for an educational game called "The History of A Law"; and
- lesson plans concerning the functioning of the major branches of government (for teachers).

The representatives of academic and governing circles will be invited to participate in an evaluation of the above described materials.

B. Recruiting Non-school Participants

Program directors will work on scheduling meetings with politicians with the intention of procuring a broad variety of political orientations.

C. Participant Application and Support

This program is designed for students and teachers throughout Poland. Their participation in the program will need to be funded so that financial constraints will not prevent eligible teachers and students from applying. 50 students and 10 teachers will be selected for participation.

Eligible students will need to satisfy the following requirements:

- a member of the 10th or 11th grade;
- a grade point average based on the first semester of at least 4.0 (on a 1-6 scale); and
- a written endorsement from the class that is certified by the teacher.

Anticipating more applications than openings, program organizers will take into account the nature of the applicants' activity in their communities as well. This is why, in addition to satisfying the formal requirements, each applicant will need to submit a short description of his/her activity in the community. This could include, for example, any materials concerning their involvement in the student government, an association, or club.

The teachers will be asked to submit a curriculum vita that will include a brief description of their activities in the area of civic education. Teacher and student applicants who come from the same school will be preferred as such an arrangement will facilitate their successful collaboration in the future.

D. Time Line and Outline of Activities

Applications for acceptance into the program will be due by February 15, 1994. After the participants have been selected, they will be mailed materials about the program by April 4, 1994. The program will be held in Warsaw from April 18 to April 22, 1994.

An Outline of Activities

Day 1: April 18, 1994

Morning:

- all participants meet and take part in the social networking /getting acquainted game

- sight-seeing tour of Warsaw

Afternoon:

- a lecture "The Sharing of Power in a Democratic Society"

- participants get assigned to different Sejm committees, the committeesset up their operating rules (e.g., choose a chairperson, a secretary, responsibilities are assigned, and so on), participants familiarize themselves with the materials that have been prepared for them

Day 2: April 19

Morning:

- a trip to the Sejm and Senate of the Polish Republic

- a meeting with the politicians representing different political views; one of the meeting topics will be a discussion focusing on the topic which will be taken up by the simulation of the parliamentary debate on day 3

Afternoon:

- a lecture on "The Polish Political System - The Relationships Among Different Branches of the Government"

- a game entitled "The History of A Law" illuminating the mechanics of bill passage

Day 3: April 20: A simulation game called "Parliamentary Debate"

The topic of the simulation game will be chosen later but will deal with some current issue.

Morning:

- work in "Sejm committees," generating a record of the session, preparing a report on the committees' work and choosing representatives to deliver the presentation

Afternoon:

- general debate (it is expected that the invited guests, including the actual representatives and senators, will participate in this general debate)

- voting on the bill

- discussion concerning the simulation, evaluation of the bill voted on, including its consequences

Day 4: April 21

Morning:

- a lecture on "Executive Branches in Poland and other countries of the world"

- a trip to the Belweder (equivalent to the White House in the United States) and meeting with the President of the Polish Republic

Afternoon:

- a meeting with the Prime Minister or his/her representative; the meeting will focus on current issues of public policy and problems that come as part and parcel of government decision making

- a simulation game called "A Difficult Decision;" students' task will be to reach a decision of national significance; a real government decision can serve as the topic of this simulation

Day 5: April 22

Morning:

- a meeting with a Supreme Court justice concerning the powers of the Supreme Court and its role in a democratic society; the meeting will end with an analysis of an actual case

- a press conference with representatives of the mass media; the significance of the "fourth branch of government" in a democratic society and the problems associated with limitations on the freedom of speech will be discussed

Afternoon:

- a meeting with youth leaders from the Warsaw community; a discussion about various forms of activity and the possibility of transplanting them into the participants' local environments
- a closing banquet; the guests will include the program's sponsors, participants, politicians, and representatives of various active communities from the Warsaw area

- official closing, including handing out program certificates

V. Outside Consultants

Implementation of this program is dependent upon the expertise of those who have been involved in similar and established projects. With the help of several American consultants, the first year of Civis Polonus will be a success. The following list of consultants will travel to Warsaw to participate in the first year of the program. Prior to their arrival, the program directors will be in constant communication with these consultants in order to utilize their talents to the fullest. The American consultants are:

- Bert Cieslak, Director of Educational Outreach, Close Up Foundation
- Richard C. Remy, Associate Director, The Mershon Center of the Ohio State University
- Nila Vehar, Executive Director, A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans

VI. Program Evaluation

Since this will be the first program of its kind in Poland, the most appropriate form of evaluation would be formative in nature. A formative evaluation strategy would include ongoing participant recommendations, program directors' observations, and appropriate adjustments as need for change arises. A summative evaluation form will be constructed for the collection of participants' comments after completion of the program.

VII. Future plans

The program's directors are convinced that participation in the program will make a significant contribution to the dissemination of knowledge about the political system in place in the Polish Republic. We expect to run the program on an annual basis. In the future, we plan, with the cooperation of the program's past participants, to conduct similar programs on a local level that would acquaint young people with the problems of their local communities.

As part of the program's evaluation, we plan to have a booklet published that will summarize the idea behind the program, describe the most important events, and quote the opinions of the participants and instructors. The booklet will, at the same time, function as an advertisement for the program that ought to facilitate its future operations.

We expect to be able to set up an exchange program whereby students participating in the Polish Civis Polonus program will have an opportunity to participate in the American "Presidential Classroom" program and vice versa.